

“I’ve Got to be in the Room Where it Happens”: Fan Pilgrimage and Tourism in Popular Contemporary Theatre

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Within the fandom of popular theatre productions, while most fans will have access to companion texts such as original cast soundtrack recordings or published scripts, relatively few will ever get to experience the production live. To be “in the room where it happened” and see the immensely popular Lin-Manuel Miranda musical *Hamilton* initially required ‘Hamifans’ or ‘Hamilton trash’ to have proximity to New York City’s Broadway, the substantial funds for a ticket and some serious patience in the year-long waiting list. Potterheads keen to see *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* had to be able to get to London’s West End, that is if they had managed to get an expensive ticket in the extremely long online queue, which in no way guaranteed a good view of the stage once there.

Theatre is an ephemeral experience. Every performance can be argued to be a reproduction of the original text. Each viewing experience will be different for each audience member. Cast members and the quality of performance will inevitably vary night to night. In the fandom of theatre texts like *Hamilton* and *The Cursed Child* a great amount of value is placed on ‘the original.’ Celebrity and fandom intersect here as original Broadway or West End casts are seen as not just the original but the *best*. The opportunity to be “in the room” becomes a kind of fan pilgrimage. This excitement is made all the more electric if the fan gets to experience the performance by the original and ‘best’ cast. In making this pilgrimage fans can be argued to be fulfilling part of their destiny as a fan of the text, a rite of passage to be part of the *communitas* of fellow fans in the theatre. As there is usually travel involved, with productions often in the fixed locations of the West End and Broadway, these fan pilgrimages also intersect with fan tourism. The quality of the experience can vary wildly, as I saw myself when I travelled to London to see both productions, and while the original cast recording or the play script provide their own levels of fan access, the aural and the written form cannot replace the visual and in fact multi-sensory experience of actually attending the event.

Exploring ideas of fan pilgrimage and tourism, in relation to popular theatre texts such as *Hamilton* and *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, through autoethnography, fan testimony found online, and interviews with fellow fans.